

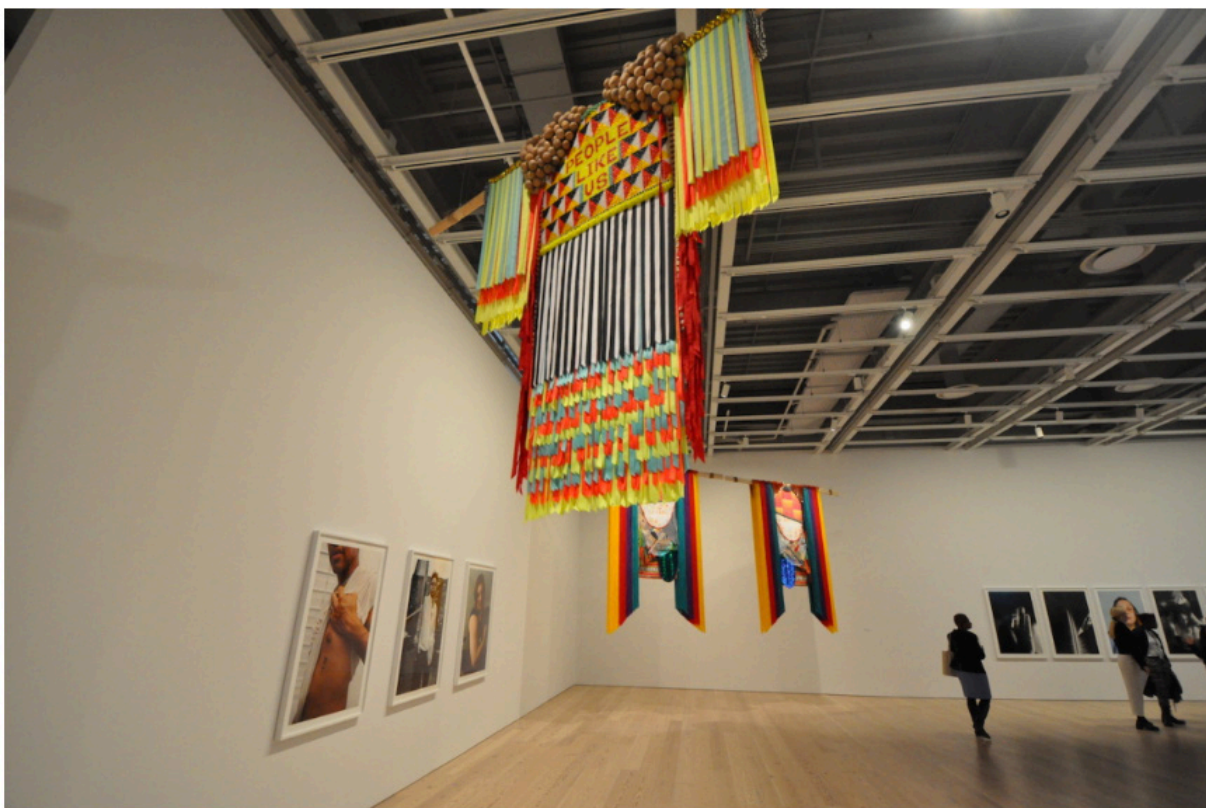
HYPERALLERGIC

Initial Thoughts and Highlights from the 2019 Whitney Biennial

What not to miss at this year's edition of America's most important survey of contemporary art.



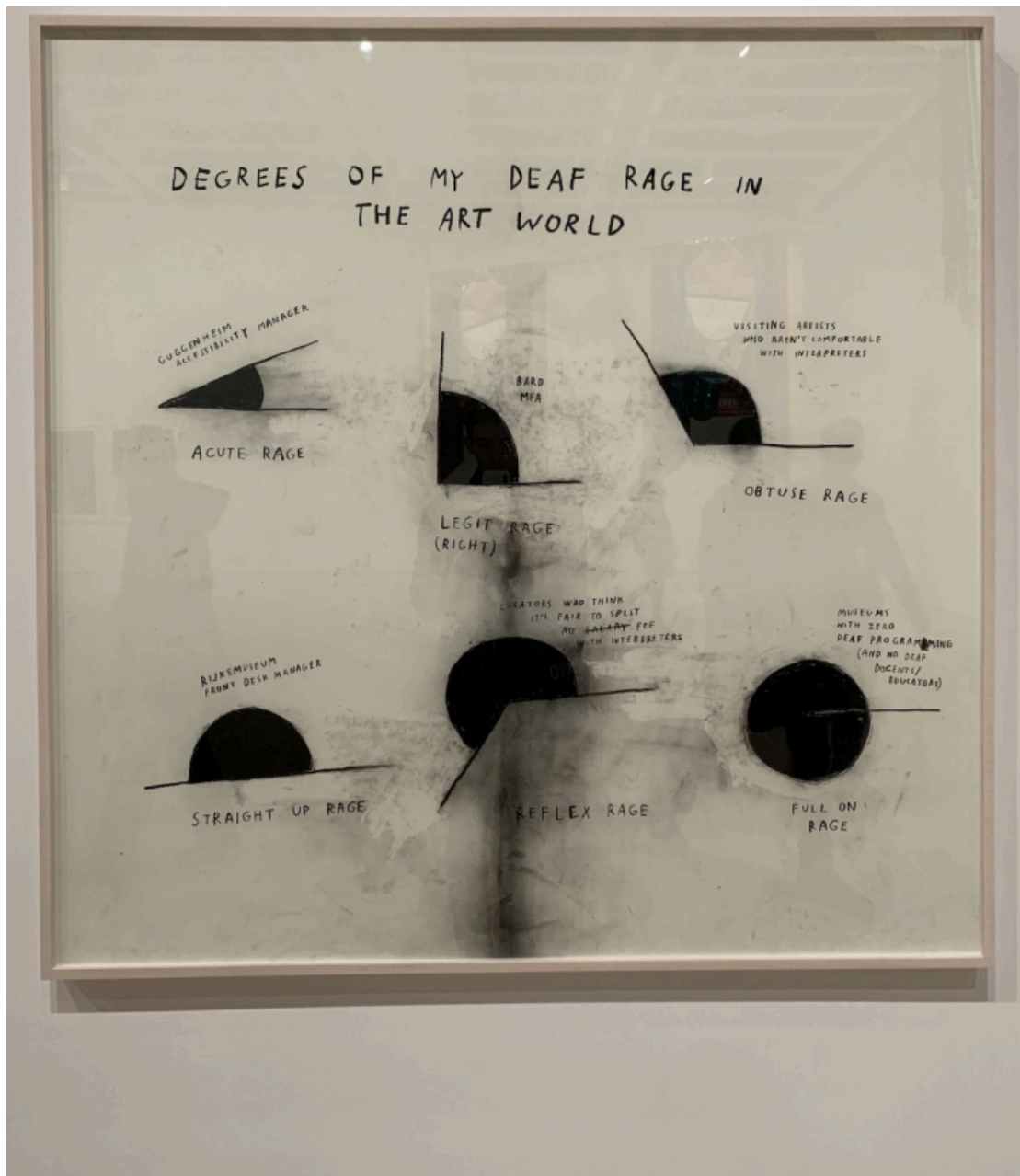
Zachary Small May 13, 2019



Jeffrey Gibson's "PEOPLE LIKE US" (2019) in front of an installation of photographs by Elle Pérez (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

The 2019 Whitney Biennial is about the state of American culture and how contemporary artists are responding to the conditions of living in a country with increasingly inequitable social stratifications.

Curators Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley have overrun the Whitney Museum with an exhibition of archaeological proportions; history has become the artist's primary medium. The past is an anchor excavated, polished, and re-presented as something startlingly new. The triumph of Trumpianism has forced artists to reexamine their own estrangement from broader culture. And although postmodern pedagogy often demands that we displace dominant narratives or overturn them completely, artists today are finding their way back to center in a reassertion of their control over this country's peripatetic sense of self.



Christine Sun Kim, "Degrees of Deaf Rage in the Art World" (2018) (photo by Zachary Small/Hyperallergic)

Elsewhere, Jeffrey Gibson has hung large textiles from the ceiling with text on them stating “stand your ground” and “people like us.” The Native American artist pulls from his heritage in his works, combining a variety of aesthetics and fabrics (sequins, quilts, fringes, etc.) into whimsical celebrations of solidarity. Nearby, the artist Christine Sun Kim displays a variety of charcoal drawings representing the different degrees to which she experiences “deaf rage,” the frustration of a deaf person who must navigate through a world that privileges able-bodied individuals.